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ABSTRACT

The University of North Dakota and the Grand Forks public school system developed a program to place students who were just beginning their teacher education program in elementary school classrooms. Elementary school teachers and administrators were asked to use their own judgment in deciding what duties would be most pertinent for the students and how much time they should ask students to spend on chores not directly related to classroom instruction. Students were required to maintain unstructured logs for their off-campus experience. During the third semester, a structured trial log was designed based on the data of the unstructured logs. Results of the program revealed that elementary school teachers can be relied upon to provide a variety of pertinent pre-student teaching experiences; students were not used merely to perform undesirable tasks; and it was not necessary for the teacher training institution to dictate time allotments. (Author/MJM)

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91

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Teachers and Student Aides

Early in 1968, eighteen first-year teachers, each of whom had been identified by her university as an outstanding graduate in the class of 1967, gathered at Harvard University for a symposium sponsored by I/D/E/A. The seminar was intended as a source of information and also a means of stimulating thought on revitalizing teacher-training programs in elementary education. One of the recommendations coming out of this meeting was:

> Teacher trainees should be scheduled into laboratory courses built around directed observation beginning in their first year of college and should have many hours of observation in different types of special situations before embarking on a program of practice teaching.[1]

Later, conferences were held between the Division of Elementary Education at the University of North Dakota and elementary school administrators from the Grand Forks public school system to arrange for the implementation of an idea that had been discussed for years but had now been excited into action by the above-mentioned report. The

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1. I/D/E/A. A Symposium on the Training of Teachers for Elementary Schools. Melbourne, Fla.: I/D/E/A, 1968.

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SP 006 143

elementary education staff at the University had long recognized the need for pre-student-teaching experiences with children. It remained only to work out the operational format, a plan that would be reasonable for the students and acceptable to the teachers in the elementary schools. Limited programs involving undergraduates in classroom experiences with children had been utilized for a number of years. Now, however, the University and the elementary schools were planning a formal program that would improve not only the teacher education program but also the educational opportunities for elementary school children.

This paper deals with only one facet of the project, placing in elementary school classrooms students who were just beginning their teacher education program. Since the vast majority of these students were sophomores, this portion of the project was referred to as the sophomore aide program. Its objectives included:

(1) to acquaint students with contemporary and innovative practices in elementary schools

(2) to provide a basis for methods and materials courses to be taken in subsequent semesters

(3) to provide extended periods of time for students to observe child behavior for concurrent and subsequent psychology courses

(4) to introduce low-level instructional activities for the sophomore aides, thus providing time for more sophisticated professional activities during the student-teaching experience

(5) to introduce to teachers and students the idea of a team approach for instructional activities

(6) to provide improved educational opportunities for children by supplying additional personnel to help pupils directly and also to release the teacher for more sophisticated professional activities

(7) to give students a better opportunity to assess their interest in and potential as elementary school teachers

There was also an operating consideration involved that was, in a way, an objective. The Division of Elementary Education decided not to identify specifically what type of activities students should engage in or how much time they should devote to those activities while they were in the classroom. The elementary school teachers and administrators were asked to use their own judgment in deciding what duties would be most pertinent for the students and how much time they should ask them to spend on chores not directly related to classroom instruction. This approach was utilized for several reasons. The staff in elementary education was of the opinion that teachers were capable and professional people who were in a position to know what experiences would be most important to persons just starting to prepare themselves for a teaching career. It would also show the students that professors, who have lectured for decades that if teachers expect good behavior from pupils they will receive it, were practicing what they preached.

Building principals explained the program to elementary school teachers, who were informed of the status of the students, the objectives of the program, and the operational format. They were also told that there were no funds available so that the students could be expected to work their way in exchange for the guidance they would receive from the teachers. On campus, the program was explained to the students entering the sophomore aide program, who would be spending one-half day each week during the semester in an elementary school classroom.

In conjunction with the off-campus experiences seminar, small groups of approximately fifteen students met regularly on campus to discuss their observations and the selected readings assigned by the instructor. Elementary school teachers and principals were invited to attend the seminars without prior notification; the Grand Forks superintendent of schools had approved the hiring of substitute teachers for this purpose.

Students were required to maintain logs of their off-campus experiences. Before these were turned in to the university instructor, they were signed by the teachers to insure that they knew what information the students were bringing back to the campus. The data in the following tables were gathered during the fourth semester the program was in effect. For the first two semesters, unstructured logs were kept by the students. In the third semester, a trial log was developed, using categories that had become evident from an examination of the previous subjective logs; slight modifications were introduced during the semester, and the final form was utilized for the data in this paper.

Table 1 presents the amount of time the students devoted to various types of activities while in the elementary school classrooms.

Table 1 here

Table 1

Total Percent of Semester Time Spent by Sophomore Aides in Classified Activities
N = 79

Activity	Percent
Clerical	45.57
Supervisory	32.54
Teaching	10.89
Observation	11.00

Nearly one-half of the time the students spent in off-campus assignments was devoted to tasks of a clerical nature, the performance of which by noncertificated personnel frees the teacher for activities at a higher professional level. Eleven percent of the time was spent by the students in observation. This category was used only when they sat passively in the classroom watching the pupils or the teaching techniques; it does not include observations made while they were engaged in other activities, such as supervising pupils in the library. Virtually as much time was spent in teaching as in observation. A rather low percentage was expected here since the students were only in their first professional course in education.

In Table 2, the four categories of Table 1 are broken down into their subgroups in order to provide a greater insight into the type of activities in which the students were involved.

Table 2 here

Table 2

Total Percent of Semester Time Spent by Sophomore Aides in Various Activities
N = 79

Activity	Percent
Clerical	
Filing, dittoing, stapling, answering telephone, etc.	14.06
Correcting papers, workbooks, tests	19.53
Other clerical tasks	11.98
Supervisory	
Assisting individual pupil with assignment	12.43
Assisting small group with an assignment, seat work	6.96
Supervising in room, gym, library, etc.	6.29
Other supervisory activities	6.86
Teaching	
Teaching a lesson to an individual child	2.40
Teaching a lesson to a small group	3.26
Teaching a lesson to an entire class	1.94
Observation	11.00

One of the most interesting areas is the activities grouped together under "clerical" in Table 1. Although 45.57 percent of the students' time was spent in this category, an inspection of the various subgroups reveals that routine, nonclassroom activities constituted only a portion of the total. Tasks that could conceivably

keep the students out of the classroom comprised barely one-fourth of the total time: filing, dittoing, stapling, 14.06 percent; and miscellaneous, 11.98 percent. As a result, the sophomore aides were either working with or observing children or correcting their papers for nearly 75 percent of the time they were in the off-campus assignment. This in itself indicates that teachers were providing them with a great deal of contact with children and the instructional programs of the school. The teaching opportunities were most often with a single child or a small group. From conferences with students and teachers, it was learned that these lessons usually involved something in the area of the language arts.

The university staff was also interested in learning if the type of activities in which the students were involved changed as the semester progressed. All of the students were assigned to off-campus stations for a twelve-week period; but because of vacations, teacher workshops, and stormy days, some were able to complete only ten or eleven assignments. Consequently, as in Tables 1 and 2, students' logs covering the first ten weeks were used to gather the data for Table 3, which gives the percent of time students spent in the major categories for each week. Percentages are based on the total time the various activities were performed.

Table 3 here

Table 3

Percent of Weekly Time Spent by Sophomore Aides
in Classified Activities
N = 79

Week	Clerical	Supervisory	Teaching	Observation
1st	42.16	30.86	5.54	21.44
2nd	52.59	30.15	7.47	9.79
3rd	48.09	31.15	10.38	10.38
4th	45.43	32.24	13.19	9.14
5th	47.67	31.36	9.58	11.39
6th	47.02	32.33	11.69	8.96
7th	41.67	31.94	17.50	8.89
8th	44.03	35.17	13.15	7.65
9th	41.49	35.74	11.53	11.24
10th	44.66	35.59	9.06	10.69
Average	45.47	32.54	10.89	11.00

Each week more time was spent on clerical activity, which was dominant during the course of the semester, than on any other, although there was a slight tendency during the last five weeks for less time to be spent on clerical chores than during the first half of the semester. Time spent in supervisory activities showed the most consistency during the period. There was a tendency as the semester progressed for more time to be spent on supervision each week. This trend was slight, but definite, except in the final three weeks when it became relatively more pronounced. Teaching activities, on the average, occupied the least amount of time each week. This was expected, since the students had neither the preparation nor the necessary experience to undertake such responsibilities except under the direct supervision of certificated teachers. There was a tendency for the amount of time devoted to these activities to increase as the semester progressed, peaking in the seventh week and

then decreasing. The first time the students were in the elementary school classroom, more than one-fifth of their time was spent in observing. For the rest of the semester, however, observation occupied no more than 11.39 percent of the time.

A review of the data reveals that elementary school teachers can be relied upon to provide a variety of pertinent pre-student-teaching experiences for students who are taking their first professional course in education: the students are not used merely to perform tasks that teachers find undesirable; it is not necessary for the teacher-training institution to dictate time allotments in order to ensure that desirable activities are provided in sufficient quantity. It is suggested that there is a morale factor involved here. Teachers respond favorably when trust and respect are accorded them.

Programs mutually conceived, formulated, and operated can provide benefits for all concerned. Elementary schools needing more adults to improve instruction can find a natural source of supply in students who are preparing to be teachers. Students, in turn, must have direct contact with children and instructional activities long before student teaching in order to have an opportunity to decide if they want to continue in their preparation for a teaching career. Another advantage of a mutual approach is the saving of school and university funds. When a program is developed so that each party serves the other, no exchange of monies is necessary. The elementary schools obtain help at various levels of ability and, in effect, the teaching staff of the university is expanded.

It is suggested that this sharing of benefits and saving of funds create desirable impressions in the minds of teachers and students.

In a society that is often criticized as being mercenary, a program providing benefits for thousands of children and hundreds of teachers and students is important, when it becomes a reality without foundation aid, government grants, or the diverting of local school funds.